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The Salvation of the Non-Philosopher

Acquiescentia in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Hannah Laurens

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1. Salvation in the *Ethics* and the *TTP*

Spinoza's philosophical enterprise, while being exceptionally rich in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and much else, is at its heart a quest for human happiness. His *Ethics* is an ethics in the classical sense of the term: it is concerned not just with right action but with the highest human good. For Spinoza, our *summum bonum* is a freedom—but of what kind exactly? Our misery, according to Spinoza, stems not so much from a continuous state of melancholy but, rather, from a *fluctuation* of the emotions. In striving for worldly goods such as honour, wealth, and romance, we fluctuate between hope and fear, pleasure and pain: 'we toss about [*fluctuari*] like waves on the sea driven by contrary winds' (*E* 3p59s).[1] Our happiness is a release from this emotional turmoil: it is a freedom from bondage (*servitus*).

Although this account sounds not unlike Stoicism, Spinoza's view has, at least to modern ears, a decidedly religious ring to it. Freedom from bondage is *salvation* (*salus*) and is achieved through knowledge and love of God. Knowledge of God is arrived at first via adequate ideas of reason, and—when reason is perfected—via the ideas of *scientia intuitiva*. Through reason we understand God not as transcendent creator but as the world's immanent cause. All that exists exists in God, and all that happens flows from the

[1] Citations of the *Ethics* (*E*) follow standard abbreviations given at the front of this volume. Quotations are from Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), with minor adjustments. Citations of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*) are by chapter and paragraph number as given in volume 2 of Curley's edition (C). Quotations from the *TTP* and its *adnotationes* follow C, with minor adjustments. The Latin text of Spinoza's writings is cited as G, followed by volume and page number.

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necessity of God's nature. In these insights we face the world with an equanimity of mind that replaces our emotional instability. Seeing the world as an infinite expression of God, we acquire a blessedness (*beatitudo*) that Spinoza defines as a 'contentment of mind [*animi acquiescentia*] that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God' (*E* 4app4). This contentment should not be understood as a neutral state midway between two emotional extremes. Rather, it consists in the greatest joy that we can come to know and constitutes human perfection. Our highest good lies in an intense *love* for God, which, according to Spinoza, is intellectual in nature all the same. This 'intellectual love of God' (*amor intellectualis Dei*) is the cognitive-affective union with God by means of which we are saved.

This conception of salvation offers those responsive to philosophy's appeal a path to overcoming the human condition of servitude. But one may worry about its wider accessibility. If *knowledge* is the means to blessedness, what about those who, for lack of education or aptitude, cannot engage in philosophical enquiry? In the *Ethics* Spinoza holds that salvation is difficult to achieve and therefore rare (*E* 5p42s). The non-philosophical multitudes, without adequate insight into the nature of God and the world, remain gripped by their emotional responses to life's vicissitudes. In the *Ethics*, salvation is the privilege of the philosophically minded few.

The alternative account of salvation found in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* therefore comes as a surprise. Here, salvation is not the prerogative of philosophers but is open to anyone of good heart and sound mind: 'Everyone without exception can obey [the divine law]', for if not, 'we would have to consider the salvation of almost all to be in doubt' (*TTP* 15 [44–5], G III 188). Ignorance, on this account, is no obstacle to salvation: 'As for the common people of today . . . everything necessary for salvation can easily be grasped in any language . . . even though the reasons for them are not known' (*TTP* 7 [82], G III 115). This is because 'whether one has been taught by reason alone or scripture alone, one is truly taught by God [*a Deo revera edoctus*] and is entirely blessed [*omnino beatus*]' (*TTP* 5 [50], G III 80).

Despite being more generous in scope, this conception of salvation may perplex the reader. A believer taught by scripture alone understands God as a transcendent ruler and creator. She thus has an *in*adequate idea of God. If salvation comes from adequate knowledge by reason, how could those with inadequate knowledge of God become blessed?

Scholars have long debated the believer's salvation as described in the *TTP*, and the general response has been to dismiss Spinoza's statements: either we should not take them seriously because they do not reflect Spinoza's

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considered opinion (e.g. Strauss),[2] or, if they do, we should qualify them such that the *TTP*'s salvation does not count as *real* salvation (e.g. Den Uyl, James, Nadler).[3]

After discussing these responses, I shall offer an interpretation that takes the believer's salvation seriously and understands it as genuine—even if, ultimately, such salvation is less than that of the philosopher (*TTP* 5 [40], G III 78). It is genuine, I argue, because the believer, too, can achieve the *acquiescentia animi* in which blessedness consists. Although the believer's *acquiescentia* does not come from adequate knowledge that is based on reason or *scientia intuitiva*, it does require some level of understanding and a personal commitment to virtue not unlike the philosopher's. Hers is a *habitus virtutis* grounded not in knowledge but in obedience: a difference which necessarily implies falsity in beliefs but does not prevent the resulting psychological state from being successful in overcoming an *animus inconstans et fluctuans*. Her *acquiescentia* is not an *amor intellectualis Dei* but, as I shall contend, an *amor practicus Dei*. Her love of God is a practical love. Still, it leads to a life lived in union with God, beyond the clutches of hope and fear.

Before proceeding with my argument, a brief caveat is required: in the discussion below, I use the term "salvation" as Spinoza understands it, i.e. as consisting in *acquiescentia animi* and a love of God attainable *in this life*. Although Spinoza (notoriously) does seem to posit the mind's existence beyond death (briefly discussed in Section 6 below), an afterlife in heaven is not what he has in mind in speaking of salvation. It is a oneness with God *during* life. This, I propose, is also how Spinoza conceives of the believer's salvation, even though the believer herself might see blessedness only as a promise to be fulfilled in the hereafter. This discrepancy, between the salvation that Spinoza ascribes to the believer and the one that the believer sees for herself, does not make my account redundant or misdirected. For where the non-philosopher is concerned, it is salvation *as Spinoza conceives it* that many do not take at face value. Only philosophers, it is claimed, can achieve true blessedness. I propose instead that the sincerely obedient person can achieve it as well: for they too possess the *acquiescentia animi* that unites them with God.

[2] L. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* [*Spinoza*], trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

[3] D. Den Uyl, 'Power, Politics, and Religion in Spinoza's Political Thought' ['Power'], in P. Bagley (ed.), *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize* (Berlin: Springer, 2000); S. James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics* [*Spinoza on Philosophy*] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); S. Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell* [*Forged*] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

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2. True Blessedness?

2.1 Mere Lip Service

Before examining the believer's *acquiescentia*, it will be helpful to assess some alternative strategies for dealing with Spinoza's ostensibly inconsistent accounts of salvation. A once popular strategy, now no longer in vogue, takes Spinoza to be merely paying lip service to the demands of his time. In the 1960s, Leo Strauss proposed a reading of the *TTP* on which the work offers an 'exoteric' message that agrees with traditional religious views in order to placate church and state authorities.[4] Spinoza's 'esoteric' message, on the other hand, is contained in the *Ethics* and constitutes his true view: a naturalistic philosophy hostile to any form of religious worship, making its presence felt in the *TTP* via contradiction and inconsistency, detectable only to those who read between the lines.

Strauss's strategy has rightly gone out of fashion because, while cautious,[5] Spinoza did not shy away from explicitly confronting his readers with unconventional and provocative views. His overt contention that religion is not concerned with issues such as the true nature of God, but with the inculcation of obedience and moral behaviour, can hardly be seen as a concession to the theologians of his day. In fact, within four months of publication, the court of Holland made its first attempt to suppress the work.[6]

[4] Strauss, *Spinoza*. L. Rice, 'Faith, Obedience, and Salvation in Spinoza' ['Faith'], *Lyceum*, 6 (1994), 1–20, at 13, refers to R. Misrahi, 'L'athéisme et la liberté chez Spinoza', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 31 (1977), 217–30; S. Hessing, *Spinoza: Dreihundert Jahre Ewigkeit* (Berlin: Springer, 1962); and W. Matson, 'Body Essence and Mind Eternity in Spinoza', in E. Curley and P. F. Moreau (eds.), *Spinoza: Issues and Directions* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 82–95, who also take Spinoza's contention that salvation can be attained through obedience as a 'metaphor or concession to popular prejudice'.

[5] The *Ethics* was published posthumously, and Spinoza published the *TTP* in 1670 only in Latin and not in Dutch. Adriaan Koerbagh, a contemporary of Spinoza who was in all probability also one of the members of Spinoza's circle, published his *Bloemhof* (1668) in Dutch, a dictionary in which he mocked and criticized the clergy, which resulted in him being sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Shortly before his arrest, while on the run under a false name, Koerbagh attempted to publish another, more philosophical work with clear Spinozist elements in Dutch called *Een Ligt Schijnende in Duystere Plaatsen*. Betrayed by his printer, *Een Ligt* was never published, and all partly printed copies were seized by the Amsterdam magistrate. After just over a year in prison, Koerbagh died of ill health. These events undoubtedly contributed to Spinoza's caution. See B. Leeuwenburgh, *Het Noodlot van een Ketter* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013).

[6] Formally, the *TTP* was banned only in 1674, but the first attempt to suppress it came as early as 16 April 1671. See J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 275–85.

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Throughout the *TTP*, Spinoza remains committed to religion as a powerful force in society, essential to a community's social cohesion and political stability. Its domain, however, needs to be firmly demarcated and its authority restricted so as not to trespass into state affairs.[7] Even so, it would be wrong to think that religion for Spinoza is merely a means to keep those without recourse to reason ignorant and biddable.[8] Such a view does no credit to Spinoza's deep respect for the genuinely virtuous person, regardless of whether her virtue is achieved by 'reason or revelation'. 'As long as it has supreme authority and is the supreme law for men', 'it does not matter how that practice [of virtue] is revealed' (*TTP* 19 [5], G III 229). Accordingly, one of the reasons why revealed religion is of the 'utmost necessity' (*TTP* 15 [27, 44], G III 185, 188) for Spinoza is precisely that only revelation tells us that salvation can be achieved via the path promoted by religion, that is, through obedience to God. Spinoza categorically holds that 'the fundamental dogma of theology [that salvation can be achieved through obedience to God] cannot be discovered by the natural light [of reason]' (*TTP* 15 [27], G III 185). Yet despite the fact that the validity of this route cannot be demonstrated rationally, Spinoza grants its legitimacy and goes out of his way to defend its possibility. He could have taken the indemonstrability of salvation through obedience as cause to reject it; instead, he consistently endorses it as a given and grounds the value and need for religion upon it.

2.2 Salvation through the Imagination

A deflationary strategy such as Strauss's, then, is best avoided.[9] A first step in aligning the accounts of the *Ethics* and the *TTP* might be to suppose that

[7] Spinoza, however, controversially maintained that state affairs included sacred matters such as the appointment of ministers or decisions on the foundations and doctrines of a church (*TTP* 19 [39], G III 235).

[8] *Pace* V. Kal, *De List van Spinoza* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2021).

[9] Others who reject Strauss's reading include A. Dominguez, 'La Morale de Spinoza et le Salut par la Foi' ['La Morale'], *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 39 (1980), 345–64; Rice, 'Faith'; D. Den Uyl, 'Power', 133–58; H. De Dijn, 'Salvation in the *TTP* and the *Ethics*', in M. Czelinski et al. (eds.), *Transformation der Metaphysik in die Moderne. Zur Gegenwärtigkeit der theoretischen und praktischen Philosophie Spinozas* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 78–87; H. De Dijn, 'Spinoza and Religious Emotions', in Willem Lemmens and Walter Van Herck (eds.), *Religious Emotions. Some Philosophical Explorations* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 105–19; and Y. Stein, 'The Coherence of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*' ['Coherence'], *Philosophies*, 6 (2021). While T. Cook, 'Did Spinoza Lie to His Landlady?' ['Landlady'], in P. Bagley (ed.), *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize* (Berlin: Springer, 2000), 209–31, does attempt to take Spinoza at his word, he concludes that,

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salvation is a gradated state:[10] one can be saved to a greater or lesser degree, with the former applying to the philosopher and the latter to the obedient believer. On the basis of this distinction, some have argued that we can make sense of the salvation of the non-philosopher by realizing that her ideas, although inadequate, do contain *some* truth, if only very little. Her ideas are derived from the imagination (rather than reason), and they are false because they involve the privation of knowledge (*E* 2p35)—but they do provide a partial grip on reality, nonetheless. Thus, to the extent that inadequate ideas contain some degree of truth, to that extent the non-philosopher can be said to achieve salvation.[11]

This approach, however, runs immediately aground in light of Spinoza's contention that for the believer salvation is achieved *despite* her false ideas: 'faith requires not so much true as pious dogmas, i.e. tenets which move the mind to obedience, even if amongst these are many that do not possess a shadow of truth' (*TTP* 14 [20], G III 176). Even if false ideas do contain some degree of truth, such false ideas do not contribute to the believer's salvation. It is her *obedience* that allows her to attain salvation. At least in this respect the *Ethics* and the *TTP* agree: the imagination offers no route to salvation.

2.3 Salvation as Social Success

If the imagination offers no route to salvation, then the salvation of the non-philosopher is perhaps not made possible through faith alone but, rather, through faith and reason operating jointly. According to Den Uyl, the kind of salvation discussed in the *TTP* is of a fundamentally moral variety that reflects a successful political and social life. Again, this type of salvation is of a lesser kind: the believer achieves social success and some level of personal

ultimately, we must concede that 'he lied' to his landlady about her being saved through obedience, though not with 'malicious' intent (Cook, 'Landlady', 230). Though I find Cook's paper illuminating in many ways, I arrive at a conclusion opposed to his.

[10] Spinoza often speaks of blessedness and salvation in comparative terms, e.g. 'Therefore, the more each person is rich in this kind of knowledge [i.e. *scientia intuitiva*], the better is his consciousness of himself and of God; that is, the *more perfect* and the *more blessed* [*perfectior et beatior*] he is' (*E* 5p31s, emphasis added).

[11] See Rice, 'Faith', 15–6. Dominguez, 'La Morale', also bases the salvation of the believer on the positive knowledge that the imagination possesses. However, such salvation is not 'real' salvation, according to Dominguez, because the imagination perishes at death (361). The extent to which the believer achieves eternity of mind will be discussed in Section 6.

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well-being, but such everyday fulfilment falls short of the exalted elation described in the *Ethics*. In this moderate form of salvation, reason and faith are said to cooperate: reason grasps the benefits of acting justly and charitably, whereas faith sustains one's commitment to acting thus.[12]

Den Uyl certainly offers a sensible account of how for practically successful individuals various faculties of mind interact, but his account cannot adequately represent Spinoza's view of the mechanics of the believer's mind. First, the believer acts from obedience prompted by revelation through prophecy, and 'prophecy depends upon imagination *alone*' (*TTP* 2 [4], G III 30, emphasis added; cf. 1 [43–48], G III 28)—both in the case of those delivering prophecy and in the case of those living by it. Reason plays no role in the believer's imaginative engagement with the Bible's narratives, even if—crucially—some kind of understanding of the divine law ensues. More importantly, however, though Spinoza does offer a distinctive reinterpretation of the notion of salvation, he never downgrades it to mere social success. Even for the non-philosopher it is an elevated mental state centrally connected to an intimacy with God. In the believer's case also, it consists in *acquiescentia*, which, as Rice reminds us, is a strong and significant word for Spinoza to use.[13]

2.4 *Vera Acquiescentia*

What, then, does the believer's *acquiescentia* amount to? Does it imply any robust salvation? Without the intellectual love of God, one may think that only a limited or partial salvation is achievable.[14] Lacking what seems to be

[12] Den Uyl, 'Power', 150–4. S. James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 211, also relates the salvation of the believer to social advantages, maintaining that the *TTP* employs a 'comparatively austere understanding of salvation', which refers to the 'benefit that flows from living co-operatively as the divine law commands', that is, the advantages provided by cohesive communities so that people are able to live and develop their interests in peace: 'thus conceived, salvation lies in ordinary reach'. James opposes this austere understanding of salvation to a 'philosophical understanding' of salvation that 'provides the clearest and most compelling form of moral liberation which, as the *Ethics* expresses it, constitutes our *true* salvation' (James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 223, italics in original). I do not agree with James that the salvation of the believer predominantly relates to social benefits, and I will challenge the idea that the believer does not attain '*true* salvation'.

[13] Rice, 'Faith', 11.

[14] Stein, 'Coherence', 10–20, maintains that the believer attains 'moral' and 'psychological' salvation (for she is virtuous and content) but not 'intellectual' salvation (for she does not attain the intellectual love of God), hence her salvation is 'partial'. Although I agree that the believer's salvation is not intellectual, I resist the idea that her salvation is therefore only partially achieved.

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its key ingredient, such salvation could not count as *real* salvation. Yet, from Spinoza's language in passages such as *TTP* 7 [68–9], we would not be justified in considering it a kind of pseudo-salvation:

> For [scripture's] teachings of true piety are expressed in the most familiar words, since they are very ordinary and no less simple and easy to understand. And because *true* salvation and blessedness consists in *true* contentment of mind [*vera salus et beatitudo in vera animi acquiescentia consistit*], and we *truly* find contentment [*vere acquiescimus*] only in those things we understand very clearly [*clarissime intellegimus*], from this it follows with utmost clarity that we can grasp with certainty the intention of scripture concerning things related to salvation and necessary for blessedness. (*TTP* 7 [68–9], G III 111, emphasis added)

Here, Spinoza connects the believer's salvation to *true* salvation and blessedness, *true* contentment of mind, and acquiescing in things *truly*. A clear grasp of scripture is essential for this acquiescence. Below, in Section 3.3, I shall further discuss this grasp of scripture and the 'certainty' that underpins it. For now, it suffices to say that by this grasp of scripture the believer has her own (rudimentary) *understanding* of the divine law, which commits her to *follow precepts* leading to a *habit of virtue* from which her *acquiescentia* arises (as set out in greater detail in Section 5). Her *acquiescentia* will not be of the same intensity—lesser, in fact—than that of the philosopher, for she does not love God intellectually but practically (Section 6). Even so, insofar as hers is a life lived in union with God, her *animi acquiescentia* is true, hence her salvation genuine.

3. Philosophy versus Revelation

3.1 Truth vs. Obedience

To see how Spinoza can endorse both the philosopher's and the believer's salvation as true salvation, it is helpful to start with the contrast, detailed in

A strong consideration against Stein's additive account of salvation is that salvation for Spinoza *consists in* contentment (as cited in *E* 4app4 above and reiterated in *TTP* 7 [68–9] cited below); hence contentment, provided it is of the right kind (see Sections 4 and 5), suffices for salvation. In addition, Spinoza speaks of the believer as *omnino beatus* (as cited in Section 1), and not as *beatus* only in part.

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the *TTP*, between philosophy and religion—or, more accurately, between philosophy and revelation, for philosophy too is a species of religion for Spinoza (*E* 5p41; *TTP* 19 [9], G III 230). Both revelation and philosophy are forms of religion because, fundamentally, they share the same theological-ethical doctrine: the divine law 'to love God above all and one's neighbour as oneself' (*TTP* 12 [34], G III 165). This divine law is universal 'to the whole human race' (*TTP* 12 [17], G III 162) precisely because it is affirmed both by rational enquiry and by scripture. Yet, although reason and revelation share the contents of the divine universal law, they differ in how the law and its contents are conceived.

Reason's conception of the law originates from an adequate conception of God, for 'without God nothing can exist or be conceived' (*E* 1p15). Such a conception grasps God as a necessary being (*E* 1p11) from which all that happens necessarily flows (*E* 1p16). Spinoza's rationalist universe is a deterministic one, and to grasp this is to grasp the truth. The philosopher will arrive at the universal law of loving God above all and one's neighbour as oneself by *grasping truth*: that God constitutes each being's eternal essence, including one's own (*E* 2p11c), and that each being acts in accordance with the necessity of God's nature. Such an understanding allows us to repay hate with nobility (*E* 5p10s) and enables us to relate all our affections to God (*E* 5p14). For Spinoza, this transition to adequate knowledge is nothing but joy (an increase in our perfection), and because this joy is accompanied by the idea of God, it is nothing but *love* for God (*E* 5p15): a love for the first cause on which all depends, which subsequently generates a love for all things that are manifestations of this first cause in time and place. This love is perfected when reason gives way to *scientia intuitiva*, a kind of knowledge whereby we are 'conscious' of all particular things as participating in the existence of God. Spinoza's use, in this context, of verbs such as *sentire* or *conscius esse* strongly suggests that *scientia intuitiva* not only involves *knowing that* God constitutes the essence of all particular things but also involves a *feeling* or *experience* of God in every being.[15] This experiential knowledge, if we may call it that, constitutes the highest kind of love possible—the *amor intellectualis Dei*.

[15] See, for example, the following passages: '[W]e feel and know by experience [*sentimus experimurque*] that we are eternal' (*E* 5p23s); '[T]he person who has a body which is capable of very many things has a mind which, considered in itself alone, is very conscious of himself, of God, and of things [*multum sui et Dei et rerum sit conscia*]' (*E* 5p39s); 'Therefore, the more each person is rich in this kind of knowledge [the third], the better is his consciousness of himself and of God [*eo melius sui et Dei conscius est*]' (*E* 5p31s); '[R]ather, conscious by a certain eternal necessity of himself, of God, and of things [*sui et Dei et rerum aeterna quadam necessitate conscius*], he never ceases to exist, but always possesses true contentment of mind [*semper*

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Revelation, by contrast, relates to the divine law of loving God and one's fellow human beings not through knowledge but through *obedience*. The non-philosopher does not grasp truth but follows a command, conceiving of God as a being with a will that issues decrees which she takes to be binding—not because she fears the wrath of God were she not to follow his law, nor because of demands made by an external authority such as the Church, but because her own conscience commits her to it.[16] Her love of God and his creation is premised upon obedience to God, which is self-imposed and knows no exceptions (*nullo excepto*) (*TTP* 19 [26], G III 232).

For Spinoza, such love is based on a fiction, for God has no free will (*E* 1p32c1), hence he cannot be 'obeyed'. How, then, can such love be considered a true love of God? As mentioned above, for Spinoza falsity has no bearing on the obedient person's love of God. Whether one takes God to be 'fire, spirit, light', or 'thought' (*TTP* 14 [30], G III 178), one's conception of God is irrelevant to faith and adhering to the divine law. Spinoza is well aware of the believer's distorted view of God and purposely juxtaposes the true and the false. God may be taken as an exemplar of life 'because he has a just and merciful mind' or 'because all things exist and act through him'; one might believe that 'he directs things from freedom' or that he does so 'by the necessity of [his] nature'; that 'he prescribes laws as a prince' or imparts them 'as eternal truths'; that 'man obeys God from freedom of the will' or 'from the necessity of the divine decree' (*TTP* 14 [30–1], G III 178). For each of reason's true insights, revelation offers a false correlate. Nevertheless, Spinoza maintains, one's love for God is nothing the less for it: '[scripture] condemns only disobedience, not ignorance' (*TTP* 13 [7], G III 168).

This contrast between philosophy and revealed religion is vital to the agenda of the *TTP*. One of Spinoza's aims in the work is to defend the freedom to philosophize, the *libertas philosophandi*, which he sought to establish by the complete separation of philosophy and revealed religion. Whereas the

vera animi acquiescentia potitur]' (*E* 5p42s). I take the experiential aspect of *scientia intuitiva* as one of its defining characteristics, but not all scholars would agree. This essay, however, is not the place to defend my interpretation of Spinoza's account of intuitive knowledge in detail.

[16] '[H]e who does good from a true love and knowledge of the good, acts freely and with a constant mind [*libere et constanti animo agit*], whereas he [who does good] from fear of evil, is compelled by evil, acts like a slave, and lives under the command of another' (*TTP* 4 [88], G III 66). The obedient believer who commits to the divine law from her own conscience and a 'true love and knowledge of the good' is not identical to the fearful believer described by Spinoza in the *Ethics*, who is led by 'the fear of being punished by dreadful torments after death' and who would otherwise wish 'to govern everything in accordance with his lust' (*E* 5p41s).

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former is concerned with truth and knowing nature as immanently caused by God, the latter deals with prophetic narratives demanding obedience to the divine law. As long as philosophy does not trespass into religion's domain, philosophers should be left in peace, free to pursue their rational investigations. Although such a denial of religion's insights into the true nature of God could hardly have been agreeable to the theologians of his day, this clean separation opens up *two* paths to piety: not just the traditional one via obedience but also one through reason. And this feature of Spinoza's account of human happiness should not be neglected: Spinoza's theory of human freedom is not a thoroughly secular account[17] but an account on which mankind's ultimate fulfilment lies in love for and union with God. Philosophy, for Spinoza, is piety. It is not atheism—the allegation of which he denies,[18] and which he explicitly equates with impiety (*TTP* 5 [40], G III 78). Theologians ought to leave philosophers be, for they do not compete and interfere with revealed religion, nor do their pursuits lead to impiety.

Even so, despite his principal concern of establishing philosophy as an honourable path to piety—the path that Spinoza develops, defends, and prefers— he does not dismiss the path through faith. While he is highly critical of theology's manipulation of the multitude by arousing hope and fear through implausible miracles and awe-inspiring ceremonies, he respects and acknowledges the obedient person's virtue and piety. Her salvation is no illusory 'object of hope', but a genuine possibility.[19]

3.2 Mathematical vs. Moral Certainty

However, *that* this is the case—that obedience can lead to salvation—is something *we cannot know*. For if we did, it could be proven through reason, and its validity would thereby depend on philosophy—an implication which in the case of revealed religion Spinoza wishes to avoid at all costs. A key difference, therefore, between salvation through reason and salvation through obedience is that the former can be demonstrated and known, whereas the

[17] Cf. J. Cooper, *Secular Powers. Humility in Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 70–104.

[18] One of Spinoza's motivations for writing the *TTP* was to dispel the popular image of him as an atheist (Letter 30 to Henry Oldenburg) (C II 15).

[19] *Pace* T. Verbeek, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise: Exploring 'The Will of God'* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36.

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latter cannot. We can have 'mathematical certainty' of the former but only 'moral certainty' of the latter:

> [B]ut I must first treat of the certainty of the prophets . . . . Unlike a clear and distinct idea, a simple imagination does not, by its nature, involve certainty. So to be able to be certain of things we imagine, we must add something to the imagination—viz., reasoning. It follows that, by itself, prophecy cannot involve certainty. As we've shown, it depended only on the imagination. So the prophets were not certain about God's revelation by the revelation itself, but by some sign. . . . In this respect, then, prophecy is inferior to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, but of its own nature involves certainty. Indeed this prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral . . . . Although this seems to show that prophecy and revelation are very doubtful, still, they do, as we have said, have a great deal of certainty. For God never deceives the pious and the elect . . . . (*TTP* 2 [3–8], G III 30–1)

As the prophets rely only on imagination and 'imagination does not, by its nature, involve certainty', 'prophesy by itself cannot involve certainty'. But even though it lacks certainty in itself and could never achieve the certainty that accompanies 'natural knowledge', through the confirmation of a God-given 'sign' it could at least achieve *some* level of certainty. While philosophy enjoys 'mathematical' certainty, revelation confirmed by signs enjoys 'moral' certainty. Here, Spinoza is utilizing an established philosophical distinction that was employed by others such as Descartes.[20] Anything conceived clearly and distinctly and anything that follows from such clear and distinct conception enjoys mathematical certainty, i.e. certainty that is absolute and leaves no room for doubt. Moral certainty, by contrast, is a kind of certainty that could, strictly speaking, be doubted but which nonetheless suffices for moral decision-making. Although not absolute, for practical decisions in relation to how to lead one's life moral certainty is all one needs.

Spinoza relies on this distinction in his account of the salvation of the believer vis-à-vis that of the philosopher. Reason generates indubitable truths, hence the salvation of the philosopher as demonstrated through the geometrical method is something about which the philosopher can have complete, i.e. mathematical, certainty. The salvation of the non-philosopher, on

[20] Descartes, *Principles*, IV. 205–6 (AT VIIIA 327–9).

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the other hand, is something that cannot be demonstrated in like manner, and which therefore can be questioned if scrutinized. But while not absolutely indubitable, for practical purposes its level of certainty—which still amounts to 'a great deal of certainty'—suffices. Although Spinoza cannot extend the same epistemic status to salvation through revelation as he assigns to salvation through reason, he refrains from emphasizing its lack of complete indubitability. On the contrary, he stresses obedience's sufficiency for practice and spends remarkable effort on its defence.

3.3 Defending Salvation through Obedience

So far Spinoza has offered us an account only of the *prophets'* certainty. The prophets may be morally certain of their prophesies in virtue of the sign they receive from God. But why should *we* accord the prophets' certainty any credibility? As Spinoza says, 'we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of theology—that men are saved only by obedience—is true or false. So . . . why then do *we* believe it?' (*TTP* 15 [26], G III 185, emphasis added). His reply, again, appeals to the notion of moral certainty:

> Nevertheless, I maintain that we can use our judgment, so that we accept what has already been revealed with at least moral certainty. I say 'with moral certainty', for we should not expect to be able to be more certain of it than the prophets were. As we have already shown in Ch. 2 of this Treatise, those who first received the revelation had a certainty which was only moral. . . . Indeed our certainty about this cannot have any other foundation than the one on which the prophets founded their own certainty and authority. We have shown that the whole certainty of the prophets is based on three considerations:
>
> (i) a distinct and vivid imagination,
>
> (ii) a sign, and finally (and principally),
>
> (iii) a mind disposed to justice and goodness.
>
> . . . But the first consideration, that they imagined things vividly, could be established only for the prophets [themselves]. So our whole certainty about revelation can and must be founded only on the other two considerations, the sign and the teaching. . . . So we too are obliged to believe scripture, i.e. the prophets themselves, only for this reason, i.e. because of their teaching, confirmed by signs. Since we see that the prophets commend charity and justice above all and aim at nothing else, we conclude from this that they

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> did not teach fraudulently, but from a sincere mind [*vero animo*], that men become blessed by obedience and faith. And because they confirmed this in addition with signs, we are convinced that they did not speak lightly, and had not gone mad when they were prophesying. (*TTP* 15 [27–34], G III 185–6; cf. 2 [20], G III 31)

Clearly, Spinoza is of the opinion that we should accord the prophets' claims credibility. Not only may the prophets themselves be morally certain of salvation through obedience, but so may we.

Spinoza argues that we are 'obliged to believe in scripture', that is, in its message that 'men become blessed by obedience and faith', because the prophets' teaching was 'confirmed by signs'. While we may be forgiven for feeling somewhat baffled by his endorsement of confirmation by signs,[21] his argument based on the prophets' teaching is perhaps not implausible. This argument seems to be focused on the prophets' *character*, which is attested to by their teachings. The prophets 'commend charity and justice', just as philosophers do, and in their teaching they 'aim at nothing else'. This devotion to justice and charity, i.e. God's law, reveals their goodness of character ('a mind disposed to justice and goodness'). Hence, we may conclude, they 'did not teach fraudulently but from a sincere mind' when they taught of salvation through obedience.

Although one can think of various objections to Spinoza's line of reasoning here (such as that he is implicitly relying on a doctrinal agreement with philosophy),[22] we must not forget that Spinoza is not offering a demonstration but merely a case for some kind of meta-moral certainty. The prophets themselves are only morally certain of salvation through obedience, and in turn we can only be morally certain of the prophets' prophesies: 'we are convinced that they did not speak lightly, and had not gone mad when they were prophesying'. To emphasize this point: we do not *know* that the prophets spoke truthfully, but we may be *convinced* that they did, hence we ought to accept their contention that the obedient are saved.[23]

[21] In *TTP* 2 [12], G III 32, Spinoza explains that signs were 'given according to the prophet's opinions and [intellectual] capacity. Hence, a sign which would render one prophet certain of his prophecy could not at all convince another, who was imbued with different opinion . . . .' It is unclear how the prophets' reception of signs should convince philosophers (who hold very different beliefs) of the certainty of salvation through obedience.

[22] Cook, 'Landlady', 222–3, is not convinced by Spinoza's 'convoluted argument'.

[23] As Spinoza admits, it is the agreement of the prophets' message with what we know to be right on independent grounds that further convinces us of the general accuracy of their insights: 'In this we are even more confirmed when we pay attention to the fact that they taught no

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The moral certainty of salvation through obedience is reason for Spinoza to fully endorse it, not to question it. He claims it is a matter of 'sound judgment' (*TTP* 15 [36], G III 187) and contends that it would be 'sheer folly to be unwilling to embrace what has been confirmed by so many testimonies of the prophets . . . merely because it cannot be mathematically demonstrated' (*TTP* 15 [37], G III 187). Spinoza ridicules the very idea of not accepting the truth of salvation through obedience: 'as if we should admit nothing as true, to organize our lives wisely, which can be called in doubt by any reason for doubting, or as if most of our actions were not uncertain and full of risk!' (*TTP* 15 [37], G III 187).[24]

This last remark, however, does not seem to pertain so much to the perspective of the philosopher assessing the legitimacy of salvation through obedience as to that of the believer. For it is the *believer* who needs 'to organize [her life] wisely' to admit the prophets' claims regarding salvation as true; philosophers, naturally, do not. Once philosophy has been embraced, salvation through revelation is no longer an option.[25]

It is the believer, then, who in the first place needs to be morally certain of the prophetic message that she will be saved through obedience. But how is *her* moral certainty generated? Is hers a second-order certainty like that of the philosopher? As she cannot rely on any doctrinal agreement between philosophy and revealed religion, her certainty would have to be grounded

moral doctrine which does not agree fully with reason. It is no accident that the word of God in the prophets agrees completely with the word of God speaking in us' (*TTP* 15 [35], G III 186). One might think that Spinoza uses reason here as a standard for the accuracy of scripture, but, rather, he uses the *agreement* between reason and scripture to bolster the latter's plausibility. He does not say that scripture must agree with reason for it to be right; rather, because scripture agrees with reason, and we know reason to be right, we can also take scripture to be right. This argument is not meant as a *demonstration* of scripture's accuracy but merely as bolstering its plausibility.

[24] Cf. Letter 21 to Willem van Blijenbergh: '. . . it would not be in our power to eat a piece of bread, or take a step, or to remain still. For all things are uncertain and full of danger' (C I 380).

[25] 'Moreover, we've shown that the divine laws seem to us to be laws, or things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into [intellectual] love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun' (Annotation 34; G III 264, C II 293). Spinoza's view is thus nuanced: philosophers and believers have different kinds of certainty, and both kinds suffice for being convinced of one's route leading to salvation—even if, once philosophy has been embraced, 'obedience passes into [intellectual] love which proceeds from true knowledge'. Philosophy superseding revelation does not mean, however, that the path through obedience is not legitimate in its own right. For the philosopher obedience to God is nonsense. Even so, the philosopher can accept that *for the believer* it is a legitimate way towards union with God (and he may be convinced of this on the basis of the prophets' goodness of mind and the agreement between their teachings and that of reason).

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predominantly in the confirmation of prophecy by signs. This seems indeed what Spinoza has in mind when referring to Moses commanding 'the people to obey the prophet who has given a true sign in the name of God' (*TTP* 15 [32], G III 186). By virtue of signs, believers would, like philosophers, obtain a kind of meta-moral certainty of theology's dictum that salvation is achieved through obedience. However, this kind of second-order moral certainty does not seem to be all. In an annotation to *TTP* 7 [66], Spinoza suggests that believers' moral certainty is also generated more directly. He distinguishes between, on the one hand, obscure utterances of the prophets that we cannot make sense of and, on the other, their message of salvation that is 'accessible to the intellect' and of which 'we can readily form a clear conception' (*TTP* 7 [66], G III 111). The annotation adjoining these quotations reads:

> By intelligible things [*res perceptibiles*] I understand not only those legitimately demonstrated, but also those we are accustomed to embrace with moral certainty and hear without wonder, even if they cannot be demonstrated in any way. Everyone grasps Euclid's propositions before they are demonstrated. Thus I also call intelligible and clear those stories of things, both future and past, which do not surpass human belief, as well as laws, institutions, and customs (even if they cannot be demonstrated mathematically). Those obscure symbols and stories which seem to surpass all belief, I call 'unintelligibles'. . . . (Annotation 8; G III 253, C II 185)

While 'obscure symbols and stories which seem to surpass all belief' are 'unintelligibles', the principal prophetic message of salvation through obedience to the divine law is 'intelligible and clear'. It is intelligible to everyone in the way that a Euclidian proposition is universally understood even prior to its demonstration. As Spinoza argues in the main text of *TTP* 7 [66–7], Euclid wrote 'most intelligible things', but 'only a very common, even childlike acquaintance with it' is required to see what Euclid meant. Likewise, no extraordinary intelligence is needed to grasp the moral teaching of the prophets because their teaching concerns 'things that are intelligible by their own nature' (*TTP* 7 [68], G III 111) and 'things which by their nature are easily grasped cannot be expressed so obscurely that they are not easily understood' (*TTP* 7 [66], G III 111). The divine law is by its nature of such intelligibility that no exceptional intelligence is required to understand it. Even when the divine law is offered through prophecy rather than reason, it is intelligible and clear and may be 'embraced with moral certainty'. Hence, believers can attain moral certainty of being saved through obedience not just indirectly,

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via signs that accompany the prophets' prophesies, but also directly, through the intelligibility and clarity of the prophetic message itself.

Thus, for Spinoza, salvation through obedience enjoys moral certainty in multiple ways: via signs, via the prophets' teaching that indicates their goodness, and via the intelligibility of the divine law itself. Whereas both the philosopher and the believer may be morally certain of the prophets' claims on the basis of signs, the philosopher may be so also (and more fundamentally) on the basis of the prophets' sincerity of mind and their agreement with reason, and the believer by way of a direct grasp of the divine law itself. In fact, this direct cognitive grasp is crucial to the question of why, for Spinoza, obedience leads to a *genuine* form of salvation. It is because of her own cognitive engagement that the believer's obedience is not merely a matter of external compliance with the divine law but also a matter of internal commitment.[26] Ultimately, it is the expression of this internal commitment through a steady practice of doing good that generates the *vera animi acquiescentia* that sets the believer free. But before exploring this next, it is worth restating that Spinoza entertained no doubts about the believer's salvation—and if Spinoza saw no reason for doubt, then there really seems no reason *for us* to doubt Spinoza's sincerity.

4. *Acquiescentia* through Knowledge

4.1 Reason's Empowerment

Let us first briefly rehearse Spinoza's *proof* of the salvation of the philosopher through knowledge. Seeing how knowledge leads to *acquiescentia* will provide us with a context against which to assess the believer's *acquiescentia* through obedience.

As set out above, for Spinoza our unhappiness resides in a fluctuating mind, an '*animus inconstans et fluctuans*' (*TTP* 4 [21], G III 62).[27] We engage

[26] I disagree here with Nadler, *Forged*, 75, who maintains that the dutiful behaviour of the obedient believer issues merely in 'external conformity to the demands of justice and charity'.

[27] 'Finally, we see that the supreme reward of the divine law is the law itself, that is, to know God and to love him from true freedom with a whole and constant mind [*animo integro et constante*]; the penalty is lack of these things and enslavement to the flesh, or an inconstant and wavering mind [*animum inconstantem et fluctuantem*]' (*TTP* 4 [21], G III 62). See also *TTP* 4 [42], G III 67, where Spinoza opposes a peaceful and constant mind [*animo pacato et constante*] to a mind that fluctuates with opposite affects [*animus contrariis affectibus fluctuat*]. There is, however, a difference between the general state of having a restless mind (the opposite of *acquiescentia*) and the more specific state of experiencing two opposed passions at once: '. . . and so we shall both hate it and at the same time love it. . . . This constitution of the mind which arises

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in a ceaseless striving to guarantee our pleasure, but as our pleasure can never be guaranteed, we know no inner peace, and our minds remain in a state of agitation that informs our perception of the world. We conceive of things that happen to us as external causes acting upon us but have no adequate understanding of these causes. When our neighbour steals our sheep, we imaginatively infer her wilful malice and greed, which arouse our hurt and a desire for retaliation. But our idea of our neighbour is confused and our retaliation, therefore, misguided. The imagination misleads us by generating mutilated ideas that awaken a passionate response, rendering us powerless and at the mercy of external events we cannot control.

Reason can overcome this powerlessness by offering an alternative conception of the world, one that is adequate and not clouded by misguided passions. Reason begins with a clear and distinct conception of God, which shows God to be eternal and an immanent cause of all that exists. If God constitutes the world immanently, and if all that happens flows with necessity from God's eternal nature, then we see that all things as finite modes of God cannot act other than they in fact do (*E* 2p49s, *E* 5p6). Our neighbour's theft of our sheep is not an expression of her personal will but, rather, a consequence of a chain of events that unavoidably leads up to this particular event. Applying our adequate knowledge of God universally to everything we encounter in life, our ideas no longer arouse misguided passions but invariably engender love. And, acting from love, we do not act in the grip of unstable emotions but from reason. We come to know ourselves as powerful agents acting from our own rational nature.[28]

4.2 *Acquiescentia In Se Ipso*

Acting from reason, our minds reach a state that is no longer in flux but one that is marked by acceptance and peace—a state which Spinoza calls

from two contrary affects is called "wavering mind" [*animi fluctuatio*]' (*E* 3p17d&s). Finally, Spinoza also distinguishes a state of temporary fluctuation when one tries to overcome a passion: 'If the anger that commonly arises from the greatest injuries is not so easily overcome, yet it will be overcome though not without some wavering of the mind [*animi fluctuatione*] . . .' (*E* 5p10s). Despite these differences, these varieties of 'wavering' are closely related to each other such that the person with a generally stable and peaceful mind will not undergo internally opposed emotions and is not plagued by a wavering that is connected to overcoming a passion (in this instance, passions do not even gain a foothold).

[28] And yet, reason is not sufficiently strong to counter *all* passions, as we shall shortly see.

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'*acquiescentia in se ipso*' or 'contentment with oneself' (*E* 3defaff25). We are content with ourselves, rejoicing in our power to act rationally and to engage lovingly with the world. This sense of *acquiescentia in se ipso* is at issue when, in *E* 4p52, Spinoza claims that 'self-contentment [*acquiescentia in se ipso*] can arise from reason, and only that contentment which arises from reason is the highest that can exist'—a claim I shall turn to shortly.

At this juncture, Spinoza's indebtedness to Descartes comes to the fore. In his *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes discusses '*satisfaction de soi-même*', which in the Latin translation is rendered *satisfactio* or *acquiescentia in se ipso*. Of this self-satisfaction Descartes says:

> The satisfaction which those who constantly follow virtue always have is a disposition in their soul which is called tranquillity and repose of conscience. But that which one acquires afresh when one has just done some action one thinks good is a passion, namely a species of joy, which I believe to be the sweetest of all, because its cause depends only on ourselves. Nevertheless, when this cause is not just, that is, when the actions from which one draws great satisfaction are not of great importance or are even unvirtuous, it is ridiculous and serves only to produce a pride and an impertinent arrogance.[29]

In this passage from Descartes, we find a distinction, also present in Spinoza, between self-satisfaction proper and pride. For Descartes as for Spinoza, self-satisfaction is an emotion, a joy whose 'cause depends only on ourselves'. Descartes, however, connects self-satisfaction with specific good actions that one understands oneself to be the cause of. Although Spinoza also recognizes this meaning of self-satisfaction,[30] strictly speaking the idea of a deed done by a free decree of mind is for him an illusion. So when Spinoza uses and endorses self-satisfaction (as in *E* 4p52), this is not connected to any specific deed but more generally to one's rationality or power of acting. Both Descartes and Spinoza, however, distinguish positive self-satisfaction from its negative counterpart, whereby one thinks too highly of oneself, leading to

[29] Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. S. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), part III, article 190 (AT XI 471–2). See also the brief entry in part II, article 63 (AT XI 377).

[30] '. . . in so far as we also understand by it [self-satisfaction] pleasure *with the accompaniment of the idea of some deed that we believe that we have done from a free decree of the mind*, then it is opposed to repentance . . .' (*E* 3defaff26expl, emphasis added). This same meaning of *acquiescentia in se ipso* is also on display in *E* 3p30s, *E* 3p51s, and *E* 3p55s.

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'pride and an impertinent arrogance'.[31] In addition, Spinoza acknowledges a second negative form of *acquiescentia in se ipso*, namely '*vana gloria*', 'vainglory' (*E* 4p58s). It is a species of *acquiescentia in se ipso* based not on one's awareness of oneself as cause but on a consideration of oneself as praiseworthy in the eyes of others. This dependency on others' opinion provides only a false sense of contentment and is fickle by its very nature.[32]

4.3 *Summa Acquiescentia*

Nonetheless, just as *acquiescentia in se ipso* is for Descartes the 'sweetest of all passions', so it can for Spinoza constitute the 'highest contentment' that a human being can achieve: 'Self-contentment [*acquiescentia in se ipso*] can arise from reason and only that contentment [*acquiescentia*] which arises from reason is the highest [*summa*] that can exist' (*E* 4p52). Scholars have been puzzled by this statement, as it is generally accepted that the highest contentment arises from the highest kind of knowledge, that is, from *scientia intuitiva* and not from reason. As Spinoza emphatically states in *E* 5p27, 'from this third kind of knowledge there arises the highest contentment of mind that can exist'.[33] There is a serious question, therefore, of how Spinoza can claim that the highest contentment of mind already arises from reason, and not only from *scientia intuitiva*.

Most scholars tend not to take Spinoza literally when he connects the *summa acquiescentia* to reason in *E* 4p52. Rutherford suggests that in this proposition Spinoza is talking 'loosely',[34] and equally Totaro and Carlisle maintain that there must be a distinction in kind between the *acquiescentia* that arises from reason and that which arises through *scientia intuitiva*.[35] If

[31] '[P]ride is an effect or a property of self-love; accordingly it can also be defined as "love for oneself" or self-contentment [*amor sui sive acquiescentia in se ipso*], in so far as it affects a man in such a way that he thinks too highly of himself' (*E* 3defaff28expl).

[32] Descartes, *Passions*, also distinguishes vainglory in part II, article 66 (AT XI 378), but does not relate this explicitly to *acquiescentia in se ipso.*

[33] *E* 5p27 is cited in *E* 5p32d, also *summa mentis acquiescentia*, and *E* 5p38s, simply *summa acquiescentia*. In *E* 5p36s Spinoza speaks merely of *animi aquiescentia* and in *E* 5p42s of *vera animi acquiescentia*. In all these passages, this highest kind of *acquiescentia* is spoken of in relation to the highest kind of knowledge, i.e. *scientia intuitiva*.

[34] D. Rutherford, 'Salvation as a State of Mind: The Place of *Acquiescentia* in Spinoza's *Ethics*' ['Salvation'], *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 7 (1999), 447–73, at 459.

[35] G. Totaro, '"*Acquiescentia*" dans la Cinquième Partie de l'"*Éthique*" de Spinoza' ['Cinquième'], *Revue Philosophique de La France et de l'Étranger*, 184 (1994), 65–79; C. Carlisle, 'Spinoza's *Acquiescentia*' ['*Acquiescentia*'], *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 55 (2017), 209–36.

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the latter is the highest, then it seems that the former cannot be so as well. I believe, however, that reason and *scientia intuitiva* are less sharply separated by Spinoza than is often thought, and that reason, too, generates the *summa acquiescentia* in which salvation consists.

The *acquiescentia* that arises from reason and the *acquiescentia* that arises from *scientia intuitiva* are often taken to differ in virtue of a difference in the contents of their respective knowledge. It is claimed that *scientia intuitiva* involves not only the idea of oneself as cause but also the idea of God as cause.[36] Through *scientia intuitiva* one understands oneself as existing in God. To be aware of oneself is to be aware of God, the highest existent of all. Naturally, then, the *acquiescentia* that arises from this awareness must be higher—even the *highest* contentment that can be, for 'man is more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing which he loves above all others' (*TTP* 4 [12], G III 60). But as noted above (Section 3.1), Spinoza explicitly claims that reason, too, relates things to God. In a set of propositions that follow one another in quick succession at the start of Part Five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that 'the mind can bring it about that all the affections of the body . . . are related to the idea of God' (*E* 5p14) and that the person who relates all to God 'loves God, and the more so, the more he understands himself and his emotions' (*E* 5p15). Furthermore, in *E* 5p20d Spinoza claims that 'this love for God is the highest good [*summum bonum*] that we can seek in accordance with the dictate of reason'.[37] Finally, in the latter half of Part Five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza connects the adequate knowledge that arises from reason with the eternity of the mind. Therefore, not even the eternity of the mind can be that which sets reason and *scientia intuitiva* apart:[38] 'the more the mind knows by *the second* and third kinds of knowledge, the greater is the part of it that remains' (*E* 5p38d, emphasis added; cf. *E* 5p39d). Whether adequate ideas are generated by reason or through *scientia intuitiva*, both kinds lead to knowledge and love of God and the eternity of the human mind.[39]

If reason leads to our *summum bonum* just as *scientia intuitiva* does, then it is not surprising that in *E* 4p52 reason leads to the *summa animi*

[36] Totaro, 'Cinquième', 73–5; Carlisle, '*Acquiescentia*', 226–7.

[37] *E* 5p20d refers back to *E* 4p28, which identifies the *summum bonum* with knowledge of God. From *E* 4pp26–7 it is clear that at issue is knowledge of God issued by reason.

[38] *Pace* Totaro, 'Cinquième', 73; Carlisle, '*Acquiescentia*', 229; Rutherford, 'Salvation', 460–73.

[39] I believe this explains why there is no clear demarcation between reason and *scientia intuitiva* for Spinoza. *Scientia intuitiva* is the *perfection* of reason; it is not separated from reason as the imagination is. It is already 'of the nature of reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity' (*E* 2p44c2, referred to in *E* 5p29d).

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acquiescentia, just as *scientia intuitiva* does. But, then, is there no difference between the states of mind reached by the two forms of knowledge? While a difference in kind would be unwarranted, there is a plausible distinction in the *intensity* of the *summa acquiescentia* arising from reason and that arising from *scientia intuitiva*:

> I thought it worthwhile to note this point here so that I could show by this example how much the knowledge of particular things, which I have called intuitive, or, of the third kind (see 2p40s2), can do, and how it is more powerful than the universal knowledge that I have said to be of the second kind. For although I have shown generally in Part One that all things (and consequently the human mind as well) depend on God in respect of essence and existence, yet that demonstration – although legitimate and beyond doubt – does not so affect our mind as when it is inferred from the very essence of any particular thing which we declare to depend on God. (*E* 5p36s)

Spinoza argues that *scientia intuitiva* is 'more powerful' than reason, seemingly because it infers things inhering in God from the 'very essence of any particular thing'. *Scientia intuitiva* relies on a more direct link between knower and the thing known: we do not grasp the inherence of a thing in God merely theoretically (as we do through reason, that is, through demonstrations such as offered by Spinoza in the *Ethics*); rather, we know and *feel* (as discussed in Section 3.1) that *that particular thing* is in God. *Scientia intuitiva* generates an awareness of ourselves and of the things we encounter as existing in God and thus offers both more immediate and more specific knowledge than does reason. As a result, its associated affective state is more powerful. Thus, while reason and *scientia intuitiva* agree in contents, and while both lead to our highest good and eternity of the mind, *scientia intuitiva* leads to greater blessedness, because we are more powerfully affected by its knowledge. In other words, when directly aware of things' existence in God, our *animi acquiescentia* is of greater intensity, and we are more deeply at peace with ourselves and the world.[40]

[40] Thus, the *acquiescentia animi* arising from reason and that from *scientia intuitiva* are of the same kind but of different intensity. Does this mean that the love for God arising from the two kinds of knowledge is the same in kind as well? This I would reject, as the *amor intellectualis Dei* is exclusively associated by Spinoza with intuitive knowledge: it is a kind of love that encompasses not only our love for God but also God's love for *us* (*E* 5p36c)—something that Spinoza does not say about the *amor erga Deum* of reason. In a similar vein, I would hold that while the

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Nonetheless, reason too yields *summa acquiescentia*, and for Spinoza it does so even when its adequate knowledge fails to overcome the passions entirely. As Spinoza argues in *E* 5p10s, 'the best we can do, as long as we do not have a perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to conceive a right principle of living, i.e. fixed rules of life that are certain, and to commit these to memory and apply them constantly to particular things that often meet us in life . . .'. Applying a rule like 'hatred is to be conquered by love, that is, by nobility' allows us to act from a rational perspective where love benefits us even when passions have some hold. Thus, 'from a right principle of living the *highest contentment of mind* arises [*ex recta vivendi ratione summa animi acquiescentia oriatur*]' (*E* 5p10s, emphasis added), thereby demonstrating that reason contributes to our *summum bonum* in more ways than one.

The path to salvation by knowledge, then, is manifold: the *summa animi acquiescentia* can be reached by direct awareness of oneself and others as existing in God (*scientia intuitiva*), but also by a theoretical grasp of our inherence in God (reason). It can even be reached by following the precepts of reason specifying a right principle of living. If knowledge already offers multiple routes to true contentment of mind, including one depending on a right principle of living, it becomes more plausible to think that Spinoza might allow for yet another route, especially if its underlying principle functions in a similar or the same way as reason's *recta vivendi ratio*.

5. *Acquiescentia* through Obedience

5.1 An Act of Understanding

The believer's path to true contentment of mind begins not with knowledge but with prophecy. From the prophets' narratives the believer grasps the divine law to love God above all things and to love one's neighbour as oneself. The believer's grasp is not simply a result of taking the prophets' (or any other authority's) word for it; it consists, rather, in *her own act of understanding*. This act does not require extreme intellectual heights and so takes place just as the grasp of any story's moral. Even so, Spinoza's account demands the believer's intellectual engagement with the law because it signals an intimate connection between understanding and *acquiescentia*. As we have seen, we

believer's *acquiescentia* is of the same kind (but different in degree), its associated love for God is, in contrast, of a different kind.

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'truly find contentment [*vere acquiescimus*] only in those things we understand very clearly [*clarissime intellegimus*]' (*TTP* 7 [68–9], G III 111; cf. *E* 4app32, *E* 5p4s). If from the prophecies the believer did not grasp the divine law 'very clearly', then true contentment of mind would not ensue: '*in this grasp* [*hac perceptione*] the common people find contentment [*acquiescit*], certainly not in testimony of interpreters' (*TTP* 7 [82], G III 115, emphasis added). This attitude appears in the more literal signification of *acquiescere*, which means 'to acquiesce' or 'to accept'.[41] The believer can truly accept the divine law, or commit to it personally, only if she herself grasps it—because to grasp the law *is* to feel its force. One who relied on someone else's interpretation of the law would miss this bindingness. It is crucial, therefore, that the doctrines of faith accommodate one's level of understanding:

> In fact, as we have already said, each person is bound to accommodate these doctrines of faith to his own intellectual capacity [*ad suum captum*], and to interpret them for himself, in the way in which it seems to him easier for him to accept them, without any hesitation, but with full mental assent [*integro animi consensu*]. . . . everyone today is bound to accommodate it to his own opinions, so that he can embrace it without any mental reservation [*repugnantia*] or hesitation [*haesitatione*]. (*TTP* 14 [32], G III 178–9)

Not only must the prophets adapt the doctrines of faith to a specific time and place; more importantly, people must interpret those doctrines in accordance with their own intellectual capacities. This ensures their own grasp of the divine law, which allows them to commit to it 'with full mental assent', that is, 'without any mental reservation or hesitation'.[42]

[41] However, the idea of acceptance does not fully express what is at stake, which is more like accepting something *and* being at peace with what is accepted. The meaning of *to acquiesce* given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, namely 'to accept something reluctantly (but without protest)', is not what is meant here—there is no reluctance but, rather, contentment. The French and Dutch translations of *acquiescere* ('*se reposer*' and '*berusten*'), for example, better convey this sense of being at peace.

[42] In stressing the believer's own grasp as essential for wholehearted commitment, I differ from M. Laerke, *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), who takes the believer's wholehearted embrace of the divine law to depend on two conditions. On the one hand, the prophetic narratives must have strong emotional appeal: 'Any genuine embrace of religion – as opposed to a merely intellectual grasp of its basic principles – requires rewriting it according to one's own mentality, giving it an *emotional charge* which *alone* allows accepting it wholly, and living according to its precepts' (61, emphases added). On the other hand, bare doctrine is insufficient and must be accompanied by 'secondary doctrines and ceremonies' to motivate the believer to obedience (181–5). Although emotional appeal and ceremonial accompaniment might aid one's devotion, I do not take those features as being

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5.2 Coercion vs. Conviction

Furthermore, *acquiescentia* can be achieved only through one's own understanding because one *cannot be coerced* into believing anything, not even the divine law. Any belief, conviction, or thought is one's own, and no one, according to Spinoza, has the power to make another believe or think differently than she does. Everybody's piety is 'under the jurisdiction of each':

> I speak expressly of the exercise of piety and the external practice of religion [which *can* be regulated] and not of piety itself and the internal worship of God, or the means by which the mind is internally disposed to worship God wholeheartedly. For the internal worship of God and piety itself are under the jurisdiction of each . . . , which cannot be transferred to another. (*TTP* 19 [3], G III 229)

The 'internal worship of God' depends on one's own beliefs about God and so lies 'under the jurisdiction of each'. As it is impossible for anybody else to determine one's beliefs, one's right to worship God as one is disposed to 'cannot be transferred to another'. It 'does not belong to any public law or authority' but requires 'one's own free judgment':

> But the nature of religion is very different. For since it consists not so much in external actions as in simplicity and sincerity of mind, it is not the domain of any public law or public authority. For simplicity and sincerity of mind are not instilled in men by the command of laws or by public authority, and absolutely no one can be compelled by force or by laws to become blessed [*beatus*]. For this what is required is pious and brotherly advice, good education, and above all, one's own free judgment. Therefore, since each person has the supreme right to think freely, even about religion, and it is inconceivable that anyone can abandon his claim to this right, each person will also have the supreme right and the supreme authority to judge freely concerning religion, and hence to explain it and interpret it for himself. (*TTP* 7 [90–1], G III 116–17)

essential to the believer's commitment. Spinoza underscores both the *intelligibility* of the divine law, which ensures that 'even a common, childlike acquaintance' suffices for understanding it, and the need for each to adapt scripture's doctrine 'to his own *intellectual capacity*' (emphasis added). This emphasis indicates that one's own intellectual engagement is what matters, rather than one's emotional response or susceptibility to ceremonial allure.

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No 'public law or authority' can instil 'simplicity and sincerity of mind', and 'absolutely no one can be compelled to become blessed by force or by laws', for blessedness depends entirely on one's own understanding and assent. Therefore, 'the supreme right and authority to judge freely concerning religion, and hence to explain it and interpret it for himself' belongs to each. Those familiar with these passages know, of course, that Spinoza's principal aim is to argue for the freedom to *philosophize*. If the conception and communication of the divine law is to be adapted for different audiences so that anyone can fully commit to it, and if no one can be coerced into thinking differently, then *philosophers* must be free to conceive of the divine law as they see fit, maintaining the right to think of God in whatever way they choose. Adaptation of the law and non-coercion of judgment argue for the *libertas philosophandi*. However, they equally argue for the freedom of believers from different denominations to interpret scripture as they wish.[43] Not only does this remove the grounds for violent religious and sectarian conflict, but freedom to use one's own judgment and to rely on one's own insight are fundamental to the believer's wholehearted and unwavering acceptance of the divine law.

5.3 The Habit of Virtue

This internal conviction and unwavering acceptance of the law manifests itself in a life of virtue. Fully committed to treating one's fellow human beings with charity and justice, the believer develops a *habit* of virtue or a 'discipline of obedience' (*disciplina obedientiae*) (*TTP* 13 [8], G III 168). She does not offer just the occasional act of 'charity, joy, peace, patience, beneficence, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-restraint' (*TTP* 5 [50], G III 80); rather, the believer's entire life is suffused with such deeds. In this respect, the obedient person's life is not that different from the life of Spinoza's rational free man—his, too, is marked by a habit of virtue based on precepts of

[43] In this context Spinoza formulates the 'doctrines of universal faith' (*TTP* 14 [25–8], G III 177–8): core propositions that all who come to God through revelation and obedience must accept. Without accepting these core tenets, 'obedience is destroyed' (*TTP* 14 [29], G III 178). These doctrines are purposely so minimal that they leave ample room for individual interpretation by believers. Whether these doctrines are acceptable to philosophers too (especially the seventh doctrine on the pardoning of sin) is a different (and controversial) question, and not directly relevant to believers' freedom to interpret scripture in line with their own opinions and intellectual capacities.

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love. The rational free man possesses adequate knowledge, but, as we saw, this knowledge is not always sufficient to fully overcome the passions. Thus, precepts of reason must be relied upon, prescribing responding to hate not with hate but with love and nobility (*E* 5p10s). Although in contrast to the rational free man the believer does not possess adequate ideas concerning God and the necessity with which everything follows from God's nature, she equally follows rules for living that enable a life marked by loving-kindness. She obeys God's decrees, and as God acts with justice and charity towards human beings, so she acts with justice and charity towards her fellow human beings. God is the *unicum verae vitae exemplar* that 'human beings may imitate by a certain principle of life [*certa vivendi ratione*]' (*TTP* 13 [20], G III 170). The obedient person's life is marked by consistent virtue, which leads to an *acquiescentia animi*, just as it does for Spinoza's rational free person.

Yet the free person's *acquiescentia* is grounded in the joy one takes in adequately knowing oneself as a cause, and such adequate knowledge of oneself is unavailable to the believer. Thus, whence does the believer's *acquiescentia* arise?

5.4 An *Amor Practicus Dei*

The *constancy* of the believer's devotion to God's will immediately suggests itself as that in virtue of which the believer possesses *acquiescentia*. The believer's steadiness of mind straightforwardly resembles the tranquillity that is a feature of *acquiescentia animi*.[44] But although constancy of purpose is essential to a life of virtue, besides relating *acquiescentia* to a personal grasp of the divine law, Spinoza relates it in the case of the non-philosopher explicitly to the performance of good deeds (*TTP* 14 [14–23], G III 175–7). Faith fully depends on one's actions and not on the affirmation of non-essential doctrines (which believers from different denominations will disagree on). 'Without works, faith is dead'—without charity, faith is meaningless babble (if not worse).

So, we are prompted to ask: how does *doing good* generate contentment? One suggestion is that good follows from doing good: love invites love. This circle of love contributes to a less conflict-ridden life, which subsequently

[44] As Cook, 'Landlady', 228, suggests: 'Peaceable and piously faithful people very often impress us with their solid, calm confidence and dignity.'

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contributes to the believer's peace of mind, her *acquiescentia*.[45] But this cannot be correct because for Spinoza the *consequences* of one's actions are not central: 'blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but is virtue itself' (*E* 5p42).

An alternative suggestion is that doing good leads to *acquiescentia* because in so acting the obedient person preserves *consistency* between her beliefs and actions. Her life is not an akratic's—it is not a life in which she acts against her better judgment. As there is no inner conflict within herself, she is fully self-satisfied and enjoys the positive kind of *acquiescentia in se ipso*. But this suggestion equally fails, because mere consistency between intention and action cannot explain contentment: even in the pleasure seeker's life there is such consistency—but the pleasure seeker lacks the right ends, and therefore lacks *vera animi acquiescentia*. Is there any other way, then, in which we might explain the believer's *acquiescentia*?

What I believe all this points to is an *acquiescentia* that is not grounded simply in the believer's faith, nor merely in her performance of good deeds, nor in the consistency between faith and good deeds; rather, I believe that it is grounded in the *expression* of faith in action. The believer loves God *by* doing good. She loves God *by obeying* God, i.e. by loving her neighbour. Loving her neighbour is an *enactment* of her love of God. As Spinoza makes clear, to act with loving-kindness towards one's neighbour is not by itself sufficient to fulfil the divine law—one must love one's neighbour *out of* love for God, that is, out of the desire to obey him: 'he who loves his neighbour *so that he may obey God* [*eo scilicet fine*, *ut Deo obsequatur*] has fulfilled the law' (*TTP* 13 [8], G III 168, emphasis added); 'no one can deny that the person who *by God's command* [*ex Dei mandato*] loves his neighbor as himself is truly obedient and blessed [*beatus*] according to the law' (*TTP* 14 [9], G III 174, emphasis added). The believer, then, does good out of a love of God. Doing good *is* her way of loving God. Whereas the philosopher loves God through an *amor intellectualis Dei*, the believer loves God through an *amor practicus Dei*. She loves God by serving God, and she serves God by acting justly and charitably towards her neighbour, acting not from self-centred desires but deriving fulfilment from bringing about God's will. The non-philosopher is saved through the effacement of the self in service to God. We must, however, think of this effacement of the self not as a sacrifice but rather as an empowerment. For, according to Spinoza's philosophy, acting from love is acting through

[45] Cf. Cook, 'Landlady', 228, who suggests that by living a 'peaceable and quiet life' the believer avoids 'unsettling public controversies and private conflicts that foster fear and hatred'.

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oneself as cause and as part of the eternal mind of God. But, of course, this knowledge of oneself as cause and as inhering in God cannot be the reason for the obedient person's *acquiescentia*. Her *acquiescentia* lies in the satisfaction derived from enacting the divine law, from being that through which God acts. In this scenario, one is not unified with God in mind (intellect) but in heart and deed: the individual's spirit is one with the Holy Spirit, the Word of God (cf. *TTP* 12 [1], G III 158). Through one's love for the other, 'each of us is in God . . . and God is in each of us' (*TTP* 14 [21], G III 176). According to Spinoza, the non-philosopher finds her deliverance in this union with God, that is, in the enactment of love for God in loving-kindness towards another. Such deliverance appears to be nothing short, at least on Spinoza's terms, of genuine salvation.[46]

6. The Comparative Question

Although the believer attains *acquiescentia* and thereby salvation through a path that differs significantly from that of the philosopher, her way of life is remarkably similar. The believer, too, lives a life of virtue in union with God by which she attains freedom from passions. In her case, the link between the imagination and the passions is broken, because even though she believes in illusions such as a will—e.g. she takes her neighbour to have acted wilfully when stealing her sheep—no passionate response ensues. Her response will always be a response conditioned by her obedience to the will of God, that is, a regulated response marked by justice and charity. In this regard, the believer's response is comparable to that of the rational free man, who must rely on the right principle of living on the occasions that his adequate knowledge of God fails to sufficiently overcome the passions.

Despite this notable parallel, however, Spinoza undeniably holds blessedness through knowledge in higher esteem:

[46] On this interpretation, Spinoza's notion of the *acquiescentia* of the believer is close to but still significantly different from Calvinist scholastic notions of *acquiescentia*, as mentioned by Steenbakkers and Moreau: 'Polanus ("fides salvifica est intima acquiescentia in divina benevolentia et gratia", *Syntagma theologiae christianae*, 1615, p. 1184), Amesius ("fides est acquiescentia cordis in Deo", *Medulla theologiae*, 1627, p. 7)' (Spinoza, *Oeuvres IV – Éthique*, trans. and ed. P. Steenbakkers and P. F. Moreau [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2020], 564). Although Spinoza does speak of God's grace (e.g. *TTP* 12 [36], G III 165 and 15 [44], G III 188), the believer's *acquiescentia* does not merely arise from a trust in God's benevolence, nor in the mere commitment of the believer's heart, but, rather, in the expression of the heart's commitment to the divine law in her actions, in virtue of which she lives in union with God, i.e. in the grace of God.

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> But he [the philosopher] who is ignorant of them [the Biblical histories], and nevertheless knows by the natural light of reason that God exists, and the other things we have just mentioned, and moreover possesses a true principle of living [*veram vivendi rationem*], that person is entirely blessed [*beatum omnino*]; indeed, he is *more blessed* [*beatiorem*] than the common people, because besides true opinions, he also possesses clear and distinct conception. (*TTP* 5 [40], G III 78, emphasis added)

Here, the philosopher is said to be entirely blessed (*omnino beatum*)—but, as we have seen, so is the non-philosopher (*TTP* 5 [50], G III 80); yet, the philosopher is '*more blessed* than the common people'. The philosopher's blessedness is greater, for besides 'true opinions' (which the believer has too) he has a 'clear and distinct conception' of himself and God. Through this knowledge of his own essence as constituted by God he intellectually loves God, which is identical to God's love for himself (*E* 5p36). Thus put, no wonder the philosopher is 'more blessed' than the non-philosopher.

But even *within* philosophy we noted various levels of blessedness or contentment. Although both the philosopher who knows via reason and the philosopher who knows via *scientia intuitiva* achieve the *summa acquiescentia animi*, that of the latter is more intense, because grounded in a more direct awareness of God (as discussed in Section 4.3). Similarly, I suggest, the philosophers' *acquiescentia* (whether they know via reason or *scientia intuitiva*) is of greater intensity than that of the believer, for theirs is founded on a more secure footing (being underpinned by mathematical rather than moral certainty). The believer's grasp of the divine law is more rudimentary than the philosopher's and proven only by prophetic narratives which appeal to experience. Even so, 'although experience cannot give any clear knowledge of these things, or what God is, and how he sustains and directs all things, and how he takes care of men, still it can teach and enlighten men enough to imprint obedience and devotion on their hearts' (*TTP* 5 [39], G III 77–8). The believer's grasp still instils 'obedience and devotion' to the divine law, resulting in a habit of virtue and a life lived in communion with God. Although her blessedness ranks lower than that of the philosopher, her contentment is no less genuine.

All the same, one may worry about the *eternity* of the believer's mind. Lacking 'clear and distinct conception', the believer only possesses imagination, 'the part which we have shown to perish' (*E* 5p40c). It seems, then, that she cannot have a mind that is eternal, not even to some small degree. An important element of what it means to be saved in the philosopher's case appears to be missing in the salvation of the obedient believer.

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But perhaps we are moving a little too fast. For, as Spinoza claims, 'if we pay attention to the common belief of men, we shall see that *they are indeed conscious* [*conscios*] *of the eternity of their mind*, but that they confuse it with duration and ascribe it to the imagination, i.e. to the memory, which they believe to remain after death' (*E* 5p34s). Although the obedient believer might mistakenly believe in a kind of immortality in which memory is retained, she is still conscious of the eternity of her mind. Similar to the philosopher who intellectually loves God, she *feels* herself to be eternal. And although her idea of this feeling is mistaken, in contrast to the pleasure seeker who lives a life dominated by fear and who is continuously acted *upon*, her awareness of God determines her life in such a way that she can be said to *act*: she acts out of love of God, not out of fear or hope related to punishment and reward in an afterlife (cf. *E* 5p41s). Although her understanding is not a rational understanding, she does comprehend the demands of the divine law and acts out of her 'true opinions' concerning the law. Perhaps her acting does not render a large part of her mind eternal, but conceivably it causes some part of her mind to be eternal—which, if the case, would be larger than that of the pleasure seeker or fearful believer.

However we resolve the question of the believer's eternity of mind,[47] most striking is that, apart from the one remark cited above, the comparative question did not interest Spinoza much. Of course, one of Spinoza's goals in the *TTP* is to defend the legitimacy of philosophy, and much of chapter 4 is devoted to this goal. He argues that the best part of us is our understanding, that in its perfection our highest good resides, that everything needs to be conceived through God, hence that our highest good lies in knowing and thereby loving God (*TTP* 4 [10–12], G III 59–60). He invokes the 'Proverbs' of Solomon to show that even scripture underwrites loving God through reason and wisdom (*TTP* 4 [40–50], G III 66–8). But while philosophy is a legitimate—and an ultimately superior—route to salvation, Spinoza devotes considerable effort to defending salvation through revelation. Those *without* intellectual knowledge of God are not lost:

> I want to remind you—even though I have said this already—that I judge the utility, even necessity of sacred scripture, or revelation, to be very great.

[47] Any plausible argument for the eternity of the believer's mind must be underpinned by Spinoza's system in some minimal way. Alexandre Matheron's solution (*Le Christ et Le Salut des Ignorants* [Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971]) of bodily reincarnation finds no support whatsoever in Spinoza's framework and cannot be maintained.

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> We cannot perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation. Only revelation teaches that this happens from a special grace of God, which we cannot grasp by reason. It follows that scripture has brought great comfort to mortal men. Everyone, without exception can obey. But only a very few (compared with the whole human race) acquire the habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone. So, if we did not have this testimony of scripture, we would have to consider the salvation of almost all to be in doubt. (*TTP* 15 [44–5], G III 188)

Spinoza would be appalled by the thought of salvation being available only to the 'very few' that 'acquire the habit of virtue by the guidance of reason alone'. Hence, he holds the 'usefulness and necessity' of scripture insofar as it teaches that salvation can be achieved through obedience 'to be very great'. Just as pious philosophers know true peace, so truly obedient believers acquire *vera animi acquiescentia*.

From the opposite perspective, once the believer's faulty knowledge is exposed, it is *equally* true that the philosopher is not lost. The question for Spinoza personally seems not to have been how the non-philosopher could be saved but how, without belief in the will of God, the *philosopher* could be saved. How can the philosopher for whom obedience to God is an illusion be united with God? Spinoza's answer lies in a conception of love of God that is distinctive in its intellectual nature. Such salvation is not only true salvation—for union with God is achieved through awareness of oneself as being part of God—it is an even higher kind of salvation (*summa* rather than merely *vera acquiescentia*). Once we understand ourselves as part of God, we understand all as part of God. We become one with God not only insofar as God constitutes what we are, but insofar as God constitutes the *whole* of nature[48]—after all, *deus sive natura*.[49]

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[48] '. . . the union that the mind has with the whole of nature' (Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in C I 11).

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